

of the storms, and ask for the blessings that can come upon people and the comfort necessary to deal with the recent tragedy. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:01 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks at Silver Street Elementary School in New Albany

March 2, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. A little bossy today, aren't I? Yes. *[Laughter]* Thrilled to be here in New Albany. Thanks for coming out to say hello. I want to talk about schools and the Federal role in schools relative to local governments—is what we're here to talk about.

I'm glad to be here in the home of the Stars, the Silver Street Stars. I brought a lot of cameras and limousines—*[laughter]*—kind of fits in with the theme, doesn't it—Silver Street Stars. I understand the school is 90 years old. You've seen a lot of decent people come here to teach, I'll bet you—a lot of people who said, "I want to put my community first," and became teachers and principals and caring citizens of the State. And so I'm real proud to be with you.

I'm here because I think it's important for a President to herald success and to talk about what's possible, particularly when it comes to schools. My only regret is that my wife hasn't joined me today. She's, by far, the best deal in our family. Just like in Mitch's family, I want you to know. I know the Danielses well, and I can certify that the person from New Albany is, by far, the best part of his family too. *[Laughter]*

I'm real proud of Mitch. I know him—he worked in my administration. I hauled him out of the private sector when I first got sworn in. I said, "Would you come and work for the country?" And he did. He was the watchdog for the people's money—it's what's called the OMB. And he did a fine job there, really, and I miss him a lot. I love his sense of humor. I knew he'd make a fine Governor. He asked me about Governor; I said, "Listen, it's the greatest job in America—next to President." But it's a great—*[laughter]*. And he's an innovative, smart, ca-

pable, honest guy, and I'm proud to be with him.

I know he cares a lot about schools too. And so when I talk about education, I can talk confidently about the schools here in Indiana, because you've got a Governor who will prioritize education. I used to say to people, public education is to a State what national defense is to the Federal Government. It ought to be the number-one priority, and I know Mitch is making it that way.

I want to thank Tony Duffy. Duffy has done a fine job of dealing with an impossibly large entourage. *[Laughter]* I really appreciate your spirit. It turns out that if you were to correlate education in a school with educational entrepreneurship at the principal level, the two go hand in hand. In other words, you have to have a good principal in order to be able to challenge failure when you find it, mediocrity when you see it, and praise excellence when it's evident. And you've got a good principal here, and I can't thank you enough, Tony.

I want to thank all the teachers, as well, who teach here. Teaching is a hard job. It's a really hard job, and it's never really appreciated enough in some circles. And I just want the teachers to understand full well that I know the community here thanks you from the bottom of their heart, and the parents thank you.

And for the parents who are here, I appreciate you paying attention to your school. It turns out, parental involvement is an essential part of having excellence in the school system. So when parents pay attention, it not only gives confidence to the teachers; it also enables the school to listen to the needs of those who matter most, and those are the parents and the children.

I appreciate very much Congressman Baron Hill joining us today. The Congressman flew down on the airplane. As you know, we're not from the same political party, but we both care about education. And it's nice of you to come. You'll meet a friend of mine who is with us, Mike and Keta—appreciate you all coming.

Now is not the time to be involved with politics when we're talking about the education of our children. This is an issue that needs to rise above politics and needs to

focus on what's right, because getting the schools right in America will make sure that this country remains competitive and hopeful and optimistic. So I'm proud you traveled with me, and it's good to see you both again. Thanks for coming.

Mayor Jim Garner and Debbie are with us. Mr. Mayor, thank you for being here, sir. Proud to be in your city. I appreciate the reception that we received from the citizens. People respect the Presidency, and sometimes they like the President. [*Laughter*] I appreciate the fact that people came out to wave.

I want to thank Dr. Reed, who is the Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction. Thank you for coming, Dr. Reed. There you are. I appreciate Mr. Don Sakel; he's the president of the School Board. Don, where are you? There you are, yes. I saw him coming in, I said, "You've probably got the toughest job in America, being on the school board." [*Laughter*] For those of you who know school politics, you know what I'm talking about. But I appreciate the school board and the board of trustees, people who serve the local community by serving on the school board, making sure that local control of schools remains an essential part of the school system in this State and around the country. Dr. Dennis Brooks, who is the superintendent of the New Albany and Floyd County school system is with us. And community leaders, thanks.

So there is a bill coming up for reauthorization called the No Child Left Behind Act. I happen to think it's, if not the, one of the most substantial pieces of legislation I will have had the honor to sign—I've signed a lot. I want to describe to you the philosophy behind the act and why I strongly believe it needs to be reauthorized by the United States Congress.

I first became directly involved with public schools from a public policy perspective as the Governor of Texas, and I was deeply concerned about systems that quit early on a child and just moved them through. In other words, I was concerned about a system where people would walk in the classroom and say, "These children are hard to educate; therefore, let's just move them through the system." It may not have happened in Indiana,

but it happened in Texas. And it was unacceptable, because guess who generally got shuffled through the system: the poor, the newly arrived, the minority student. And I knew that unless we confronted a system which gave up on children early, that my State would not be a hopeful place.

And so I decided to do something about it, and I took that spirit to Washington, DC. Now, look, I fully understand some are nervous when they hear a President talking about Federal education. You start thinking to yourself, the Government is going to tell you what to do here at the local level. Quite the contrary, in this piece of legislation. I strongly believe in local control of schools. I believe it's essential to align authority and responsibility. And by insisting upon local control of schools, you put the power where it should be—closest to the people.

On the other hand, I know full well that to make sure a system doesn't lapse into kind of the safety of mediocrity that you've got to measure. See, in my State, we said, we want to know whether or not a child can read and write early, before that child gets moved through the system. And so I insisted upon accountability, and the spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act is the same.

It says, if you spend money, you should insist upon results. Now, I recognize the Federal Government only spends about 7 percent of the total education budgets around the country, and frankly, that's the way I think it should be. In other words, if local people are responsible or the State is responsible, that's where the primary funding ought to come. But I also strongly subscribe to the idea of the Federal Government providing extra money for what's called Title I students, for example, students who go to this school—money that I think bolsters education for students in the community.

But I also believe that in return for you spending that money—it's your money, after all—it makes sense for Government to say, "Is it working? Are we meeting objectives? Are we achieving the results necessary for all of us to say that the school systems are working nationwide?" And so step one of the No Child Left Behind Act was to say, "You've got to measure."

We didn't design a Federal test, because I believe a Federal test undermines local control of schools. As a matter of fact, Mitch and Baron and I were talking in the car about how Indiana has had a longstanding accountability system, and that's good. It ought to be your accountability system; after all, it's your schools. But I do believe you need to measure, and I know you need to set high standards and keep raising those standards.

In life, if you lower the bar, you get lousy results. If you keep raising that bar, it's amazing what can happen. I call it challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. And that's an important part of the No Child Left Behind Act. We expect people to set high standards and measure to determine whether or not those standards are being met.

Now, one of the interesting debates in the school systems is curriculum. I imagine you've had a few of those tussles here; we had a lot of them in the State of Texas. Reading curriculum, for example, there was a longstanding debate over which type of system works better. And it can get pretty heated. One way to cut through all the noise, however, is to measure. If the children are learning to read given a basic curriculum, then you know you picked the right way to teach, the right set of instructions. If your children are not meeting standards, then an accountability system gives you the opportunity to change. And school systems, in my judgment, need to be flexible. That's why local control of schools makes sense. When something isn't working, you need to correct. But what the accountability systems enable you to do is determine if it's working at all.

I think it's very important for there to be transparency. In other words, when you have scores—I don't know if you do this, Mitch, or not, but I would strongly suggest that you post them for everybody to see, across the State of Indiana. It's kind of hard to tell how you're doing relative to your neighbor unless there's full accountability—in other words, unless everybody can see the results. A lot of times people think their school is doing just great—the principal, in all due respect, says, "We're doing just fine; don't worry about it, community." But you may not be. And it's important for people to fully understand how your school is doing relative to

other schools, so that if you need to correct, you're able to do so. See, if you have high standards, then you want to aim to those standards and make sure that you're doing well relative to other schools that are setting high standards.

Finally, what we need is to make sure that we individualize, as best as possible, the school system. That's what happens here at Silver Street. In other words, when you use your accountability system properly, you can tailor it to each individual student. That's why the act is called the No Child Left Behind Act. It doesn't say "all children shouldn't be left behind;" it says "no child." In other words, you can individualize curriculum based upon accountability, and this school does that.

Testing data has helped teachers tailor instruction. Here's what your principal said. He said, "We drill down in the data." In other words, they take the data and drill down—I presume you meant analyze a lot. Yes, that's good. I'm from Crawford, Texas, too, so I know. *[Laughter]* They analyze. They drill down in the data and figure out what the best practices are that we need to be using in the classroom. In other words, they use the data, not as a way to punish but as a way to improve.

The spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act says, we will spend money, we will use accountability to drill down to make sure no child gets left behind. You know, one way you can really use this, particularly in your early grades, is for literacy. Science doesn't matter if the child can't read. It's really hard to be good in math if you don't have the capacity to read the problems in the first place. And so I know this school is focused on literacy, as it should be, as a step toward educational excellence in all subjects.

I appreciate very much the fact that this school uses the accountability to focus on teaching techniques. Sometimes, probably not in this school, but sometimes teachers have got the right heart, but they don't have the techniques necessary to deliver the results that are expected. And so you can use your accountability system, if you're wise, to make sure that the techniques are analyzed and the compassion in the classroom is

backed with the skills necessary to be able to achieve objectives.

Here's what the principal also says—and this is an important part of excellence—“We never give up. There are no excuses.” Sometimes if you don't measure, you can find all kinds of excuses. And it's just not in schools; it's life. The easy position sometimes is the default—by saying, “Well, I just didn't have what was necessary to get the job done,” or something like that. This is a no-excuses school. That means high standards. Low standards are a place where people find excuses; high standards, there is no excuse, and there's a focus on what's right for each child.

And that's why I'm here at Silver Street. I appreciate so very much that this school has met State standards for progress under No Child Left Behind every year since 2002. [Applause] Isn't that interesting? Isn't it interesting to be able to say that? You can't say something that draws applause unless you measure. Without a measurement system the president would be saying, “Well, we anticipate that we are doing well. We certainly hope that we're meeting State standards.” Under this system you can say, “We know we're meeting State standards.” And that should give the parents who pay attention to this school a great comfort and give the teachers who teach here great pride.

The No Child Left Behind Act is working across the country. So when Members of Congress think about reauthorization—by the way, I'm here to—I'm not only speaking to you; I'm lobbying. This is—I'm lobbying Congress. [Laughter] I'm setting the stage for Congress to join me in the reauthorization of this important piece of legislation.

The test scores across the country are heartening. Now, there's still a lot of work to be done—don't get me wrong—but there's improvement. One of my issues is that there's an achievement gap in America; certain students are doing better than other students. White students are doing better than African American students or Latino students. And that's not—that's simply not acceptable. It's not acceptable to the country. It's not—it forebodes not a positive future, so long as that achievement gap exists. The gap is closing. It's heartening news.

Fourth graders are reading better. They've made more progress in 5 years than the previous 28 years combined. In other words, we're able to measure whether or not all children—and by the way, we disaggregate results. That is a fancy, sophisticated word meaning that we're able to focus on demographic groups. And the progress has been substantial. You just heard that it's easy to quantify how well we're doing because there's measurement.

In math, 9-year-olds and 13-year-olds earned the highest scores in the history of the test. I hear some people say, “Oh, we don't like tests.” I didn't like them either. [Laughter] But it's really important to make sure that we're achieving standards, and so reauthorizing this good piece of legislation is one of my top priorities. And my claim is, it's working. Now, we can change parts of it for the better, but don't change the core of a piece of good legislation that's making a significant difference in the lives of a lot of children.

We're living in a competitive world. Whether people like it or not, the reality is, we live in a world where our students are going to have to compete for jobs with students in China or India or elsewhere. And if this country wants to remain the economic leader in the world, we've got to make sure we have a workforce capable of filling the jobs of the 21st century. And it's a real challenge for us. It's a challenge we're going to meet, by the way. There's no doubt in my mind we can meet it.

But it really starts with elementary school. It really starts here, in schools like this. And it's important to get it right early, to make sure that children have got that foundation necessary to become the scientists and the engineers and the leaders for tomorrow. No Child Left Behind Act is a central part of the competitiveness initiative, to make sure that America remains on the leading edge of change and is the economic leader of the world.

We can do some other things around. One thing we need to do is to make sure that we align our high school graduation requirements with college readiness standards, which is precisely what the State of Indiana has done. We want to make sure that a high

school diploma means something. I happen to believe that we ought to take the same accountability that we've got in elementaries and junior highs and get it to high school, just to make sure; to be able to say with certainty, the high school diploma that somebody gets really means something, that it's working.

I fully believe that we need to advance—that we need to spread Advanced Placement courses around the country. Advanced Placement is a fabulous program. It's a way to set high standards, isn't it? And we need to train teachers in AP and help students afford the AP exam. AP is a good way to—[applause]—we've got an AP teacher back there.

Math and science are really important subjects. I can remember—math and science probably doesn't, like, have cachet. It's not cool, but it's important to emphasize math and science. And one way to do that is to take math and science professionals and encourage them to go into classrooms. I went to a school with Margaret Spellings, who happens to be the Secretary of Education, a dear friend of mine, and doing a fine job—and we went to a school in Maryland, and there was a scientist from NASA explaining the beauties of science.

Parents sometimes have trouble explaining the beauties of science. I certainly did when I was trying to work on those science projects. [Laughter] But when you get a professional, somebody who knows what they're talking about, they can really enlighten a child to the benefits of math or science focus. And so we've got a program to work with Congress to get more of those professionals in classrooms. We call them adjunct professors. I hope the Congress funds that program. So there's one way, for example, to build on the No Child Left Behind Act, focus on high schools and math and science.

Secondly, one of the things that we've got is—in our budget is to understand that when a school struggles, that there ought to be extra Federal money to help the struggling school. And I look forward to working with Congress to fully fund that. We've got incentive—a teacher incentive fund, grant programs to encourage teachers to go to schools that need extra help with the teachers. I think it makes sense to give school districts grant

money—or States to give grant money—to say, here's a district that needs focus. It's test scores probably aren't as good as they should be. If there needs to be additional qualified teachers there, we'll provide incentives for the teachers to go.

Thirdly, I strongly believe that there needs to be consequences when there's failure. And, oh, by the way, Baron and I talked about this, and Mitch and I talked about the accountability systems. They ought to be flexible; we understand that. Now, flexibility does not mean watering down standards. In other words, when we talk about accommodating special needs students in terms of the accountability system—which I understand is an issue, and so does Margaret Spellings, who is working with Congress on this issue—we cannot use that flexibility to water down accountability.

And so we—Margaret briefed the Governors and told Mitch and all the other Governors, we'll work with them, just so long as we maintain those high standards. And I believe we can make sure that we accommodate school needs without watering down this important piece of legislation. Watering down No Child Left Behind Act would be doing thousands of children a disservice, and we can't let it happen.

We've got a—one of the problems we have—well, one of the good things in the bill was that when a child is in a school and has fallen behind—a Title I child—there's going to be extra money for tutoring, which I think is a great idea. In other words, you find a young child early in his or her career, school career, and they can't read, there's extra money. Now, one of the problems we've had is for—is to make sure we get the test scores out in a timely basis to school districts who, therefore, can then get the information on a timely basis to their parents, to make sure that the extra tutorial money is available for their child.

Sometimes the best intentions get stuck in getting the information to students. And so Margaret is going to work hard with Congress to make sure that parents whose child is not meeting standards and who is eligible for this extra money gets notified early

enough to be able to take that money wherever the parent may want their child to receive tutorial help. See, I'm a person who believes that parents know best when it comes to the interests of their child. And therefore, when we find a school that is persistently in failure, parents must be given different options. There has to be a consequence. Something has to happen if schools refuse to change and a child stays trapped in mediocrity. And one such consequence is to give parents the ability to send their child to a different school, public or private, as far as I'm concerned.

Another option, and something I strongly support, is for there to be competitive grant programs for opportunity scholarships. You know, in Washington, DC, we've got a terrible problem there in the public school system because it's not meeting standards. They're just simply not getting the job done in too many instances. And so I work with the mayor, a Democrat mayor—a Democratic mayor—who, by the way, believes what I believe, that when you find failure, you can't accept it. And so you know what we did? We put forth what's called opportunity scholarships for families of the poorer students, so their family, if the school isn't meeting needs, can afford to go to a different kind of school. What matters is the child getting the education. That's what matters most. And my attitude is, if there's persistent failure, it makes sense to liberate the parents so their child can have a better chance.

So here's some reforms I look forward to working with Congress on. This is a piece of legislation that is—it's vital for the country, in my judgment. It's working, and I think we ought to make sure it stays in law. And I'm looking forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats to get it done. I've reached out to the bill sponsors in 2001, Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts, Congressman Miller of California, Congressman Boehner of Ohio, and Senator Gregg of New Hampshire. These four gentlemen worked with the White House the last time to get the bill done; we're in consultations now to get it reauthorized.

I'm pleased to report, we're all headed in the same direction. In Washington, when you get everybody like that headed in the same

direction, sometimes you can get some things done. Believe it or not, it is possible to put aside the sharp elbows of partisan politics and focus on what's right for the country. And in my strong opinion, the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind is right for the country, and that's what I've come to New Albany to tell you.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:38 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., of Indiana, and his wife, Cheri Herman Daniels; former Representative Michael E. Sodrel and his wife, Keta; Mayor James E. Garner, Sr., of New Albany, IN; and Mayor Adrian M. Fenty of Washington, DC.

The President's Radio Address

March 2, 2007

Good morning. One of my most solemn experiences as President is visiting men and women recovering from wounds they suffered in defense of our country. Spending time with these wounded warriors is also inspiring, because so many of them bring the same courage they showed on the battlefield to their battle for recovery.

These service men and women deserve the thanks of our country, and they deserve the best care our Nation can provide. That is why I was deeply troubled by recent reports of substandard conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Most of the people working at Walter Reed are dedicated professionals. These fine doctors, nurses, and therapists care deeply about our wounded troops, and they work day and night to help them. Yet some of our troops at Walter Reed have experienced bureaucratic delays and living conditions that are less than they deserve. This is unacceptable to me; it is unacceptable to our country; and it's not going to continue.

On hearing the reports about Walter Reed, I asked Secretary of Defense Bob Gates to assess the situation firsthand and report back to me. He confirmed that there are real problems at Walter Reed, and he's taken action to hold people accountable, including relieving the general in charge of the facility. Secretary Gates has also formed an independent review group that will investigate how this